

A

Theology vol 90.

S E R M O N,

PREACHED IN

GLOCESTER CATHEDRAL,

ON

SUNDAY, MARCH 8, 1789,

BEING

THE DAY APPOINTED FOR RETURNING THANKS

FOR THE RECOVERY OF

HIS MAJESTY'S HEALTH.

BY THE

REV. EDWARD WILSON,

CANON OF WINDSOR,

AND PREBENDARY OF GLOCESTER.

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G L O C E S T E R:

PRINTED BY R. RAIKES;

AND SOLD BY THE BOOKSELLERS IN GLOCESTER;

AND H. GARDNER IN LONDON.

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TO THE



HIS MAJESTY'S HEALTH

BY

REV. EDWARD WILSON

CANON OF WINDSOR

AND FREDERICK OF GLOUCESTER

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A D V E R T I S E M E N T

TO THE

R E A D E R.

THIS publication is not with
the smallest view of any per-
sonal advantage to its author. Hav-
ing his ambition fully gratified, by
his long and distinguished connec-
tion with the late Earl of CHAT-

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HAM,

HAM, and the supreme honour of being Preceptor to the present First Lords of the Treasury and Admiralty; and having, through their friendship, early obtained that provision which gratifies all his wants, and that preferment which is the completion of all his wishes, he has no interested motive to prompt him, no selfish object to pursue.---Neither is it a measure very consonant to

to his feelings, to obtrude a Sermon of his upon the public ; but at the pressing entreaty of many respectable auditors, he has been induc'd to commit this to the prefs.-----The suddenness of the call, both for preaching and printing it, must be his excuse for all its errors and defects.

GLOCESTER,
March 10, 1789.

PROVERBS

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fects, &c.

CLOSTER
March 10, 1799.

 PROVERBS, Ch. xxix. v. 2.

When the righteous are in authority the people rejoice.

THIS maxim is not built on the abstract reasonings of the solitary Pedant, or the speculative reveries of the unpractis'd Politician. It is extracted from the records of a great, an affluent, and a prosperous Prince, whose character for wisdom stands superlatively high in the annals of fame, and whose measure of experience was copious and full. All the honours, all the riches, and all the power, that awaken the ambition of humbler individuals, he enjoyed at an

early age. He had ever walk'd in the garden of life, had pick'd its choicest fruits, and cull'd its fairest flowers. He entertain'd no design that he could not execute ; conceiv'd no wish that he could not gratify ; saw no pleasure that he cou'd not attain ; and knew no misfortune but satiety.—From the sum of his unparallel'd experience, he has furnish'd posterity with a choice collection of useful lessons for every situation in life ; and one of those lessons is the maxim in my text.

When we contemplate exalted Characters, we seem to have before us an experimental conviction, a visible representation, of that image of God, in which, as revelation

lation informs us, man was at first created. We can scarcely, indeed, see any individuals raised amongst their species to the distinctions of rank and honour, without looking up to such elevations with a degree of awe and respect. And when such distinctions are accompanied with the milder graces of mercy, and benignity,—when earthly Potentates resemble the DEITY in justice and goodness, as they do in power and authority,—they insure the affections, as well as command the homage of their subjects. Heroes may subdue, Tyrants may awe, and Wealth may suppress the struggles of humanity, or the murmurs of the oppressed:—Every species of power may enslave the persons, but it is Justice and Goodness that command the hearts

hearts and affections of men. Power without goodness is the object of our fear and aversion; and every man is on his guard even against wisdom, when it is not temper'd with the softer qualities of mercy and benignity. But when majesty is cloathed with righteousness, when those who are consider'd as GOD's vicegerents resemble the ALMIGHTY in justice, goodness, and beneficence,—then like a temperate air, and unclouded Sun, they not only please but animate,—they enliven and exhilarate the spirits, and ornament the face of nature,—*When the righteous are in authority the people rejoice.*

Man is said to be born free, but at the same time, with so much frailty in his composition,

position, as to want aid and support in every step of life. And it is a question, not easily determin'd, whether a state of liberty, without any restraint, or a state of restraint excluding all liberty, is the more miserable. The former exposes the human species to the frauds and rapines of the profligate and idle. The latter subdues whole nations to the capricious humours of a flatter'd and abus'd Tyrant. The first keeps them in a constant state of war and tumult; and the last makes them languish under a base depression of spirit. Under the first they are beasts of prey; under the latter they are beasts of burthen.

The happy mean betwixt these two extremes, is that judicious mixture of power

and subjection, of authority and submission, which limits men's rights, and restrains their passions; which represses the haughty, and protects the humble; which insures to every man his just birth-right, and the fruits of his honest industry; which enables him to lye down in peace, sleep in safety, and wake to enjoyment. Without these securities, in a climate like our's, disorders wou'd inevitably ensue, cities wou'd become tumultuous, and life a burthen. The inhabitants of this island are not of dispositions that will brook abject slavery, nor of tempers that will bend to kiss the rod of despotism.—And it is our happiness, that we are neither expos'd to the caprices of an arbitrary Tyrant, nor to the wildness of ungovern'd multitudes;—to
groan

groan under the severity of merciless inquirers, or the madness of lawless men. Our laws are neither written on the sand, to be defac'd by every wind; nor stain'd with cruelty, oppression, or bloodshed. Thro' the wisdom and prudence of our forefathers, the powers of the Sovereign, and the liberties of the Subject are so well defin'd, so properly guarded, the happiness and comfort of the governor and governed are equally provided for.

Instructed by the histories of former times, and fully appris'd of the excellency and efficacy of that envied balance of dominion and subjection, of authority and restraint, which is the characteristic feature of the British

tish Constitution, we are not only careful to watch every threaten'd danger, but suspiciously awake to every shadow of apprehension, lest our Rulers should be tempted to overstep the limits of their authority, and invade the rights of the People. We are ready to persuade ourselves, that the very nature of their situation prompts them to assume new privileges and prerogatives, and to stretch and extend those that confessedly belong to them.—And this excess of caution may frequently repress the ebullitions of power ;—but the completion of felicity depends on the disposition of the Sovereign. To attain this desirable perfection, his Crown must be encircled with justice, wisdom, and benevolence. Without these necessary ornaments,

naments, without these brightest jewels of the diadem, its lustre would be tarnished, its beauty defac'd, and all its splendor eclips'd.

The virtues of private persons, however exemplary, however praise-worthy, operate only on a few : their sphere of action is necessarily limited both in power and extent. The influence of their example, and the lustre of their good deeds is narrow and confin'd. But a just and wise Prince is a blessing as extensive as his kingdoms. His virtues secure the possession, and enhance the value of all the good things they enjoy. They give increase of happiness to the happiest of his people, and render the distressed less miserable.—As the precious ointment pour'd

on the head of AARON descended and diffused an agreeable fragrance to the skirts of his cloathing, so do the actions of a virtuous Prince diffuse happiness and joy over all his subjects.—*When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice.*

Men of all ages and all countries have been ready enough to acknowledge, that such a governor is an invaluable blessing. But where, it may be ask'd, has he ever existed?—Imagination may fashion, and fiction may paint, such an earthly deity; but royal biography might be compris'd in a nutshell, if it was confin'd to the histories of such Princes only.—We read, indeed, of many who have been highly extoll'd by the sycophants

flatterers with which they were encircled, or the dependants that liv'd upon their nod; but Truth is obliged to confess, that she has seldom been engaged in recording the virtues of Princes.

The language of adulation wou'd in this place equally disgrace the Pulpit and the Preacher. But the sincere and universal joy at this time manifested throughout these realms, will not allow me to be silent.—I should stop shamefully short of the limits of propriety, if, thro' an excess of caution in avoiding a censurable degree of praise, I shou'd leave the smallest suspicion on the minds of my hearers, that the Monarch, for whose restoration to health and dominion
we

we have this day offer'd up our praises and thanksgivings, was in any possible danger of being class'd with those Princes that have been either the scourges or the tyrants of their people.

The late unhappy calamity, which suspended for a time the exercise of royal authority, seems to have taught us sufficiently, if we wanted such a lesson, that our gracious Sovereign reigns not only over the persons, but in the hearts of his subjects.

Rous'd into a quick sense of the dangers that threaten'd us, and animated with a lively recollection of the happiness we enjoy'd, we were justly alarm'd at the precipice on which we stood.

No

No elegance of manners, no brilliancy of talents, no measure of integrity, no union of interest, in the characters we had to look to, cou'd contribute in any satisfactory degree to diminish the dread, or lighten the affliction, that overspread this Island.

The adulation of a court was not then wanting to assure us that we had liv'd under a Monarch, whose mild government diffus'd comfort and security over all the land; whose liberal encouragement gave life and animation to all the arts; whose generous protection kept the implements of the artificer and the sails of commerce constantly in motion; whose endearing condescensions, and amiable disposition, sooth'd the sadness

forrow, and diffus'd happiness and joy to all around him ; whose exemplary manners, religious deportment, and love of decorum, gave vigour to virtue, and despondency to vice. The dread of losing such a Monarch might well spread a gloom over every countenance !—And the distress that then overwhelm'd us, was a testimony that did equal credit to the virtues of the King and the love of his People.

While his health remained perfect, tho' we enjoy'd all the benefits of his sovereignty, we might not properly estimate their value, or consider the source from whence they were deriv'd. Though our happiness and peace were equally secure, and our joys and
comforts

comforts flowing in a full channel, we might not be sufficiently grateful to the Dispenser of those favours, nor duly sensible of our obligations to Heaven for such distinguish'd blessings.

— This languid attention, this torpid insensibility, seems ever to have been chargeable on human nature. The daily, the frequent, the obvious and conspicuous favours of the GREAT RULER of Heaven and Earth, however admirable in themselves, or however astonishing to a reflecting mind, are not so often as they ought to be the objects of men's attention and gratitude. The constant rising of the sun, the descent of fruitful showers, the return of temperate seasons,
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the providential dispensations of the necessities of life, the means of improving knowledge, the protection from dangers, and the wonderful provisions for happiness which we constantly experience,—are blessings of perpetual obligation, and on that very account they are perpetually disregarded.—Every shower that falls bids us look up to GOD as the fountain from which it flows. Every ear of corn, every blade of grass, carries the signatures of a Divine hand. And the indelible characters of power, wisdom, and goodness, daily distinguishable in all the works of nature, are indubitable proofs that GOD is attentive to all our necessities, tho' we are unmindful of his goodness.—But when we see extraordinary manifesta-
tions

tions of Providence, when the power of his Almighty Arm is seen in severe judgements, or miraculous deliverances, they rouse and awaken our dormant senses, and impress us with a full conviction of our own weakness, and our constant dependance on our HEAVENLY FATHER.

No blessing comes so seasonably as in the hour of necessity: we then are sensible of the want, and attentive to the value of it.—Bread is never so sweet as to the hungry soul, and drink never so welcome as to the thirsty.

When the *Israelites* were bless'd with fruitful seasons, with plenty of corn and
G wine,

wine, and had all things richly to enjoy, they were dispos'd to think lightly of the benefits they received, and forget the LORD from whence they sprang; but when the ALMIGHTY caused streams to flow from the hard rock to refresh their thirst, when bread descended in showers from Heaven, and the winds were winged with flesh to satisfy their hunger, then they cou'd acknowledge his powers, and vow perpetual obedience for the time to come.—But, as the Psalmist complains, *They soon again forgot the works and wonders that the LORD had shewn them; they remembered not his hand, nor the day that he had delivered them from the power of the enemy. They distrusted his promises, repin'd at his dealings, disobey'd his laws, and apostatiz'd from his covenant,* When

When the late dark cloud hung over our heads, we were ready enough to recollect the abundant share of blessings we had enjoy'd.—We then were sensible that Heaven had poured upon us the good things of life from its largest phials.

In sacred as well as profane story we have instances of Kings that might be well consider'd as the infliction of punishments for the sins of the people.—We consider'd it as the punishment of our sins, that the life of our King was expos'd to danger.

As the favours we have receiv'd at the hand of Heaven are superior in their nature, larger in their extent, and greater in
number,

number, than other countries have to boast of, let our gratitude flow in as plentiful a channel.—No place is unfit, no time unreasonable, for expressing our thankfulness to ALMIGHTY GOD for all the mercies that he hath vouchsaf'd us. As we are every hour of our lives receiving favours from our HEAVENLY FATHER, our gratitude is a duty of hourly obligation.—But there are some occasions which seem more signally mark'd by the hand of Providence, more peculiarly testimonial of his mercy and loving kindness, and therefore call for more distinguish'd expressions of praise and thanksgiving.

When unexpected and undeserved favours fall into our laps; when we are delivered

vered from straits, in our apprehensions, inextricable; and enabled to surmount difficulties seemingly insuperable;—these are especial moments for such easy sacrifices.—We shou'd, indeed, like trees planted by the water side, bear fruit more or less continually; but more kindly and more abundantly when warm'd and cherish'd by the hand of Heaven.—On the present occasion our indispensable duty must assuredly be our highest gratification.

Let us then reflect that GOD has chang'd our sorrow into joy; or, to use the language of the Psalmist, *Turned our mourning into dancing, put off our sackcloth, and girded us with gladness; hath consider'd our trouble, and*

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known our soul in adversity; hath set our feet in a large room, and given us a goodly heritage. There is sprung up a light for the righteous; and joyful gladness for such as are true hearted. In fine—The Righteous are in authority, let us therefore rejoice and be thankful!



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